

Hobbies

Millions of marks worth but a few pfennigs

By Roger Boye

Today's column answers more questions from Chicago Tribune readers.

Q—We found a German bill worth 500 million marks inside an old book we bought at a flea market. The date is Sept. 1, 1923. Are we rich?

B. M., Itasca

A—No; your bill probably would retail for less than 50 cents, depending on its watermark, color and condition. Germany issued millions of large-denomination bills during the great inflation era after World War I. The money has no legal-tender value and most varieties are common among collectors.

Q—Do Canadian coins have any silver value? What dates are special?

B. C., Highland Park

A—Canada switched to nonsilver circulating coinage in 1968.

Dimes, quarters, halves and dollar coins dated 1967 or earlier contain silver, as do some dimes and quarters made in 1968. Also, Canadian five-cent pieces produced before 1922 include tiny amounts of the precious metal.

Q—Are the terms "pure gold" and "solid gold" identical? I've seen them used in advertisements.

E. A., Wheaton

A—Not necessarily. "Pure gold" equates to .999 fine, or 24 karat gold, while "solid gold" can be less than 24 karat. "Solid gold" merely means that the item being promoted is solid—that is, not hollow.

Q—What methods are used to produce fake "rare coins"? What should I look for?

J. H., Chicago

A—Forgers solder mint marks to the metal and alter numbers in the dates (such as making a "3" out of an "8"). Also, some con-

artists produce counterfeits using a mold or dies created from a genuine coin.

Hobby pros detect such handiwork with high-powered magnification, X-ray spectrography and specific gravity tests, among other things.

Uncle Sam's newest bronze medal depicts Lady Bird Johnson, widow of President Lyndon Johnson. The design duplicates a Congressional Gold Medal that President Reagan presented to Mrs. Johnson late last month in recognition of her efforts to beautify the country.

A three-inch medal costs \$16 and the 1½-inch specimen is \$2.25; to order, send a check made payable to the United States Mint to the mint at Box 500, Philadelphia, Pa. 19105.

Also, the mint is charging \$7 each for 1988 uncirculated coin sets, the same price as last year.